



Insights into Open Local Governance

A product of the Open LGU Research Project
(<http://www.lguopendata.ph>)

FULL DISCLOSURE POLICY IS NICE BUT NOT ENOUGH

The Philippines is one of the 8 pioneering countries in the world that founded the Open Government Partnership in September 2011. The partnership calls for greater availability of government information to the public, implement standards of transparency and accountability in governments, as well as use technology for openness and accountability.

However, the Freedom of Information Bill (FOI), one of the expressions of government's openness to the public, has been awaiting enactment for almost 18 years now. The bill both requires mandatory disclosure of information to the public and acknowledges that every Filipino has the right to access government records, exempting only those that are in the nature of national security, foreign policy, trade secrets, privileged communication, or those subject to constitutional limitations.

While waiting for the bill to be enacted, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) in 2011, implemented the Full Disclosure Policy (FDP). The policy requires local government units (LGUs) to post in websites the summary of revenues collected and funds received, disbursed, and appropriated; procurement-related documents; and status and use of funds and projects. For LGUs without websites, DILG launched the Full Disclosure Policy Portal (<http://fdpp.blgs.gov.ph/>) in November 2012, where local government units can post the required documents. Documents uploaded in this portal, and even in LGU websites, are PDF files or pictures, with little or no opportunity for user action besides printing, saving, and viewing.

As a way to encourage compliance, DILG awards the Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH) to compliant LGUs. As a punitive measure, LGUs' failure to comply with the

directive is punishable by suspension or removal from office of its officials, on the ground of gross negligence or dereliction from duty.

In 2011, as a result, more than seventy-five percent (75%) of the number of total local government units in the country complied with the full disclosure policy.



FDP seeks to make local governments more transparent and accountable by providing information to the public. Further, it is envisioned that it would create more democratic spaces where citizens can influence on how they are governed. But two years after its implementation, has the policy started to move towards its intended results?

The Open LGU Research Project implemented in the provinces of Bulacan, Bohol, and South Cotabato, found out that **while the FDP indeed made available the required information in the websites** alongside other information useful to citizens, there are several issues that emerged that shows that the policy is insufficient. These issues are briefly discussed below:

1. **The FDP required LGUs to supply information, but it did not require LGUs to conduct activities to inform the public that the information is available in the websites.** Thus, only very few (between 1-10%) of representatives from civil society, business, media, and academic institutions are aware that the FDP exists and

that information is available.

2. **DILG requires documents to be published in websites without necessarily asking the public what sorts of local governance information they need.** As such, the types of information the public is interested in getting are not those that are required to be published by the FDP. For example, academic institutions are interested in knowing how the Special Education Fund is utilized. CSO representatives want to know the status of each government project at the end of the year. These types of information are not required by FDP.
3. **The public does not have the capacity to understand the documents made available through the FDP.** Most of these documents are financial in nature and requires a certain degree of competence on the part of its readers.
4. **The FDP only makes possible the provision of governance information to a select segment of the population.** In a most recent study, internet penetration in the country is only at 36%. Thus, notwithstanding the type and nature of information provided, the information provided through the FDP failed to reach a majority of citizens in the country.

It is quite apparent that supplying information to the public is only meaningful when the information provided is what the citizens need and in a format that they are able to understand. While the Full Disclosure Policy made possible the provision of information, it failed to acknowledge the awareness, interest, needs, and capability of its intended audience. **It is proposed that DILG should review the FDP to make information provision demand-driven and responsive to the aspirations of the citizens.**



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